

September 17, 1999

## **ICC RELEASES REPORT ON NORTH CLYBOURN GAS MAIN ACCIDENT**

An Illinois Commerce Commission staff investigation into an October, 1998 natural gas accident and fire at 1507 North Clybourn Avenue in Chicago, was released today and includes a series of recommendations aimed at improving procedures for more precise markings of utility facilities at construction sites and tighter monitoring of major construction projects when underground utility facilities are present.

On October 30, 1998, a 24-inch diameter cast iron natural gas main operated by Peoples Gas was damaged by excavating equipment during construction of a sewer project. The escaping natural gas ignited approximately 40 minutes later, causing major fire and heat damage to a nearby 15-story apartment building owned and operated by the Chicago Housing Authority.

Quick action by Chicago fire and police personnel resulted in the complete evacuation of the building's occupants during the 40-minute period prior to the fire.

The staff report focuses on three major areas, 1) utility facilities locating activities and sewer main installation, 2 )Peoples Gas' emergency response and system shutdown and 3) post-incident events which include metallurgical testing of the damaged section of gas main.

The report includes a number of findings following an extensive investigation of the October 30, 1998 accident. Included in those findings were the following:

- The sewer line contractor properly notified DIGGER, the Chicago's one-call system for excavators, and Peoples Gas responded in a timely manner;
- Peoples Gas properly located and marked the gas main on the street and sidewalk, however, evidence was inconclusive as to whether the gas main was properly or improperly marked in the area beyond the sidewalk.
- Construction site plans showed that the sewer main was to be installed by the sewer line contractor parallel with, not at an angle toward, the gas main. A site survey by Hanson Engineers, on behalf of the ICC, indicated the sewer main was not installed parallel to the gas main, but rather at an angle toward the gas main;
- The Hanson Engineers survey also revealed that the actual distance between the installed sewer main and the gas main near the sidewalk at North Clybourn

Avenue was seven feet between center lines, not ten feet as shown on the contractor's sewer line project plans;

- Peoples Gas operations and distribution personnel responded promptly in identifying the proper valves and dispatching personnel to shut down the system;
- Metallurgical tests indicated the gas main was fractured as a result of a very powerful blow from an excavator, that the overall condition of the damaged section of the gas main was exceptionally good, and tests revealed several areas other than the fracture site where the gas main had recently been struck;

Included in the report were recommendations that Peoples Gas:

- ◆ Improve the facilities locating record-keeping system to be specific as to the types of facilities located;
- ◆ Revise procedures to require the use of a locating device for all follow-up locating or remarking of utility facilities;
- ◆ Develop specific guidelines for determining the appropriate level of company monitoring of excavation projects which are near the company's facilities;
- ◆ Request and review construction plans involving excavations near the company's facilities;
- ◆ Identify valves made inaccessible due to street overlays or other causes, then clear the obstruction to make them accessible;
- ◆ Formulate a prevention plan with those involved in street overlays or other construction projects to minimize interference with access to utility facilities.

The Natural Gas Pipeline Safety Act of 1968 authorizes the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Transportation to prescribe safety standards for the transportation of gas and for pipeline facilities. The Act allows each state to serve as an agent for the US DOT in the monitoring and enforcement of the safety standards. The ICC's Pipeline Safety staff perform inspections of intrastate natural gas facilities in Illinois, including public utilities and other gas system operators, to ensure compliance with the federal and state safety standards and may recommend enforcement proceedings when natural gas facilities are found to be in violation of these standards. The Act also requires the staff to investigate all reportable accidents and to report their findings and make recommendations if further action is required.

Copies of the ICC staff report may be viewed on the ICC website at **[www.icc.state.il.us](http://www.icc.state.il.us)**.

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